

CHAPTER III

SENSATION AND REACTION

BY our senses we maintain some connection with our surroundings. Of the real nature of our environment we are profoundly ignorant: but it contains our food—the material upon which Life exercises its changefulness—and to secure this we require not only percipient senses but powers of movement. The necessities of plants are less complicated. They feed upon inorganic substances, occurring in the soil or in the air, which are widely diffused by natural forces, and generally will come if they are waited for. Plants have accordingly cast anchor in the ground, and have lost all but the elements of sensation. Animals must ordinarily seek for their food, whether it consists of vegetable substances or of the bodies of other animals. They have also to avoid the appetites of others. In this matter plants are helpless; but they have in compensation a power of recuperation which enables herbage, however closely grazed, to restore itself. Animals, further, need senses in order to discover their mates, save in the rare cases when individuals are hermaphrodite. Moreover, without senses social life would be impossible; and in the case of many animals, man included, a gregarious impulse has developed itself so strongly that death is hardly worse than to be ignored by others.